

I found out I was going to be a mother at the age of fifteen, expecting a beautiful baby boy. He was born March 26, 2014. His name is Grayson, and he saved my life.

I grew up in Old Saybrook, CT. A lovely, quiet community that expected only the best for their children and nothing less. I didn't make the cut. I grew up in a broken home where my parents never showed love for each other, there was heavy drinking and physical arguments. Always being put in between and having to side with one parent or the other. This resulted in my father telling me at the age of six, "I don't want you to be my daughter anymore." Growing up I did what was common for teenagers my age, I rebelled. Smoking, drinking, abusing drugs, the whole nine yards. I never really fit in. The other kids my age always excelled in their academics and sports where as I, could barely stay in a classroom for more than ten minutes. I was out of control, even my closest friends at the time couldn't stand being with me because they knew no matter what they said or did I wouldn't listen. I continued to go down the spiral I was trapped in.

After years of mental, physical, and sexual abuse I thought I reached my breaking point. But then I discovered that I was with child. I dropped everything, cold turkey. No more drugs, no more drinking and no more smoking cigarettes. The withdrawals were intense, on top of being pregnant it was hard for me to get a grip on reality. I was very depressed knowing I was going to be a single mother and I felt like I didn't have the strength to raise a child all by myself. That feeling instantly went away when I went to the doctor's appointment where they would finally determine the gender of my baby. I was going to be a mother of a beautiful, bouncy baby boy. Finally, things started looking better for me. He was healthy, and for the time being I was happy. I entered into a relationship with a guy and his family really helped me out, they still do to this very day. I was just turning seventeen when I applied to the Middletown Adult Education Program on the Old Saybrook site. While I was in school, my boyfriend's mom watched my son. But, that didn't last too long. An incident occurred where my boyfriend's mother could no longer watch my son while I went to school since she was labeled as a registered child abuser. I know she would never harm my son, I trust her more than I trust myself with him sometimes. But it was just a really risky situation if he ever got hurt on accident over there.

I still had to go and get my education. There was no way I would come this far and just give up. That's when I scheduled a meeting with the school counselor to seek out my options and that's when she introduced me to their Even Start Program which was in the Middletown site. Because I live 45 minutes away, transportation wasn't going to be easy. I don't have my driver's license nor did I have anyone to bring me. My only option was to take a bus, two buses actually. Every morning I'd wake up and rush myself and my 1 year old son (at the time) to make sure to get on the bus on time. The hour long bus rides everyday while carrying along my son in his car seat and his stroller was extremely difficult. Fortunately, I was lucky there were good people also riding the bus that would help me carry things on and off it. I still never made it to school on time. Classes start at 9 A.M. and I arrived at 9:15 everyday which meant I wasn't really eligible for a face to face class, so I took a computer class instead. It's all worth it, everyday. I'm able to

complete my high school credits and I will be able to graduate while my son attends an early learning program which sets him up to be ready for pre-school.

The Even Start Program does a variety of activities between parent and child as it recognizes the factor of parents being their children's first teacher. My son always excelled with all of the age milestones but I really see a major jump since he started attending this program. He has a large vocabulary and has become very observant. He has very close relationships with his teachers and fellow classmates making him more comfortable and eager to learn. The teachers teach them through music, dance, reading and creative art projects. Before even hearing about this program I thought such a thing never existed, a place where my child also gets a high quality education in a safe, joyful environment seems too good to be true. I'm forever grateful for this program and the teachers in it for providing me and my son with this opportunity.

The Even Start Program has given me the chance to finally get my education and help me further it even more with the help of the College and Career Center. It guides students to the process of internships, job placements, and training opportunities. It also helps you build your resume and your transition to college. My life is finally on track and heading into the right direction with the help from my school.

Even Start gave me a second chance to do it right. It has and will continue to be a blessing to many other families. Please continue to support this Dual Generation Family Learning Program.

Thank you,

Alexis Weeks